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Canadian Doubts Bombing, CIA Tie

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Canadian businessman Robert Manina told The Denver Post Saturday that he doubts the Central Intelligence Agency was responsible for the fire and explosion that destroyed his sports car in Canada in May 1979.

Interest in the car's destruction was sparked in Colorado last week when prosecutors in the Eugene Tafoya case in Fort Collins released a transcript involving a conversation between a man believed to be Tafoya and someone named "Jim." During the conversation, the man believed to be Tafoya refers to a bombing in the Kitchener-Waterloo area of Canada on the "27th" of some unspecified month.

At about 2 a.m. on May 28, 1979, Manina's late-model Jaguar was blown up in the driveway in Kitchener.

The possible significance is that Tafoya, accused of attempting to kill Libyan dissident Faisal Zagallai in Fort Collins in October 1980, has said he went to Zagallai's apartment at the request of the CIA.

Manina confirmed in the interview with The Post that his firm had sold sophisticated surveillance equipment to Libya, whose government the United States opposes.

A former Green Beret, Tafoya contends he shot Zagallai in self-defense. Prosecutors allege the assault was an attempted assassination performed for the Libyan government.

In the transcript released by Fort Collins authorities, "Jim" tells the man identified as Tafoya that there is some skepticism about whether the "job up north" was carried out and something "tang-

ble" is needed to prove the mission was carried out.

At one point, the voice prosecutors believe is Tafoya's says on the tape: "Well, my counterpart was there, but, as a matter of fact, we both, I laid the charges, the charge and I fired that sucker up."

Manina, while saying he didn't think the CIA was responsible for blowing up his car, confirmed that he had been approached by former CIA agent Edwin P. Wilson, who wanted Manina's firm to do business with the Libyan government. Manina's firm later sold the equipment to the Libyans.

Wilson subsequently fell out of favor with the CIA and has been accused by a grand jury of illegally shipping explosives to Libya as part of a scheme to train terrorists there.

On Friday, Manina's former next-door neighbor in Kitchener, accountant William Pernfuss, said Manina told him that he thought the destruction of his Jaguar XKE might have been a "warning" from the CIA, resulting from his business dealings with Libya.

Pernfuss told The Post that Manina traveled extensively to Ireland and Libya on behalf of his then-employer, Leigh Instruments Ltd., headquartered in Ottawa, Canada.

Manina was a vice president and general manager of the Leigh plant located in the Kitchener-Waterloo area.

Pernfuss said Manina told him that he felt the CIA might have been involved in the destruction of his car because "we are manufacturing very sophisticated surveillance equipment and it is being sold to Libya, and Libya and the U.S. are not the best of friends."

But Manina, in a trans-Atlantic phone conversation Saturday, strongly denied telling Pernfuss he thought the CIA was behind the destruction of the car.

"I don't know where the hell he (Pernfuss) dreamed that up. I have no reason to suspect the CIA. I don't think the CIA would blow up a car in a driveway," he said.

Pernfuss said that after the explosion — the force of which he said nearly blew him and his wife out of their bed — Manina, an electronic engineer, told him of strange events at the high-security Leigh plant, which involved break-ins in which nothing was taken. The break-ins occurred before the Jaguar fire.

Pernfuss said Manina told him that the police were brought in to investigate. He said Manina told him his subsequent inquiries to the police resulted in their telling him (Manina) the case was closed, "don't ask any questions" and to "keep his mouth shut."

The accountant said his neighbor concluded that the Leigh factory break-ins sounded like they might be conducted by U.S. authorities.

Manina said he recalled no break-ins in the Leigh plant in Kitchener. The only incident he could recall, he said, was in August or September 1977 when the manager of a pizza parlor across the street from the Leigh plant told him he had seen two men lurking around about midnight, peering into his office — where he was still working — with binoculars.

He said the episode was reported to local police.

Manina, who says he left Leigh in 1980 and is now retired, stressed there was nothing "devious" in the business transactions with the Libyans and that the equipment sold to the Libyans was covered by a Canadian export license.

He declined to say what equip-

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ment was sold and what Libyan agency took delivery. He simply said it was delivered to a "a civilian agency of the (Libyan) government."

Manina stressed that his role, and that of his former employer, with the Libyans and Wilson was "strictly business."

Manina said Kitchener Fire Department investigators had led him to believe vandals probably were responsible for blowing up his car and that "no one really suspected foul play."

Manina's wife Elma confirmed one detail supplied by Pernfuss. She said that the afternoon before the explosion a neighbor who lived across the street from the Maninas received a phone call from a person asking whether the home across the street that had the Jaguar parked outside belonged to Bob

Manina. The neighbor answered affirmatively and the caller abruptly hung up.

Jerry Beckner, chief of the fire prevention bureau of the Kitchener, Ont. Fire Department, said Saturday night that he clearly remembered the event, which he investigated.

He said the fire stuck out in his mind because it involved a dark-colored Jaguar sitting in the middle of a driveway. Beckner said he remembered the cause of the fire was listed as "undetermined, of suspicious nature."

Asked whether fire investigators recovered a box of matches, Beckner said: "We did find something, and we did find something, stuck in the (gas) tank."